

## Corvair racers capture land speed records on the Bonneville salt

Brandon Gillogly 20 August 2020

You're looking at the current record holder of the SCTA's F/Classic Production class. For now, at least. In the last few years, there's been some competition in the Bonneville classic production classes, where body modifications are minimal and aerodynamics can be tricky.

This particular Corvair racing endeavor started three years ago. Greg Lloyd and Rick Deerwester were driving back to Kentucky from Bonneville Speed Week 2017. Lloyd had just helped Deerwester crew on his G/Classic Production (G/CPRO) Porsche 924 and decided then and there that he was going to go after a record of his own. With 30 hours of driving ahead of them, Lloyd had plenty of time to scour the Southern California Timing Association (SCTA) rulebook and find a record that he felt was beatable.

Lloyd didn't have to look too far from the class he and Deerwester were competing in to find a worthy target. If he could find a car with an engine slightly under 3.0 liters, the F/CPRO class seemed within reach. After some back and forth with Deerwester, the idea of a Corvair came up. Neither knew much about the cars at the time, but they were pretty sure the Chevy's flat-six powerplant was in the right ballpark. As Lloyd often says about his addiction to land speed racing, "It's all Rick's fault." That phrase is even on their race shirts and has become the unofficial team name.

Once back in Kentucky, some research with his road-racing connections brought Lloyd to Michael LeVeque at LeVair Performance. LeVeque has been building and racing Corvairs for 25 years and even had the right car to kickstart Lloyd on his quest for land speed records: his personal daily driver that he sold to Lloyd.

When combined with the big camshaft that offers 312 degrees of advertised duration, this engine only comes alive at about 4000

rpm, on the way to its 6300-rpm power peak where it puts out 198 horsepower to the wheels at Utah's 4000+ foot elevation.

Those kinds of engine speeds would have been hell on the factory fan belt, which makes quite a journey in its factory orientation. The crankshaft is horizontal, and so is the crank pulley, but the fan is perpendicular, its axis pointing vertically. Rather than keep the factory setup, LeVeque designed his own system that is inspired by the Porsche 911's fan. Keeping the fan pulley, belt, and crank pulley in the same plane allows it to keep the engine happy as it wails along the salt.



The engine is so high-strung that Lloyd needs all the help he can get at the starting line from the push truck. Once he reaches about 30 mph he pops the clutch and pulls away. The car uses the factory Corvair four-speed transaxle housing, but LeVeque pirated gears from other Saginaw boxes and did some custom machining to get a closer ratio than factory. First gear is good for about 78 mph at 7200 rpm. Shifting to second gear, the Corvair will keep pulling to 103 mph. Third gear goes to 128 mph and fourth gear is where the records will hopefully fall. The team had the transmission gears REM polished to reduce friction and improve efficiency. Every horsepower counts when you're only making 200 hp to begin with, and the altitude robs the engine of oxygen.

In 2018 Greg and his crew, comprised of his son, Ben, along with Michael LeVeque and Michael's brother, Scott, captured the F/CPRO record at 138.742 mph only to have it fall a month later when the Montana Vigilante team ran their Chevy Citation X11 to a two-run average of 142.925 mph. Speed Week was a bust for most racers in 2019, and this Corvair didn't fare any better. After weather delays pushed racing back several days, Lloyd finally got his chance to make a run. Just as he was passing 125 mph he hit a rut on the course and spun out. Rather than risk another spin on



## TUCSON CORVAIR ASSOCIATION

Established 1975

The **Corvairsation** is a monthly publication of the Tucson Corvair Association, which is dedicated to the preservation of the Corvair model of the Chevrolet Motor Division of General Motors. The Tucson Corvair Association is a chartered member of the Corvair Society of America (CORSA) as Chapter 357.

**Membership dues** are \$15 per year for individuals and \$18 for families. Initial dues are \$19 for individuals and \$22 for families (includes one name tag). Make checks payable to the Tucson Corvair Association and mail to the TCA Treasurer.

**Change of Address:** Report any change of address or phone number to the Membership Chair.

**CORSA membership** dues are \$45 per year (\$90 for 26 months) and include a subscription to the CORSA Communiqué, a monthly publication. Rates are \$37 per year and \$74 for 26 months for a "virtual" membership. CORSA membership is not required for membership in the Tucson Corvair Association, but is highly recommended. See any TCA officer for more information.

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## TCA 2021 Events at a Glance

### Third Tues of each month

**Monthly Meetings.** 7:00pm. O'Reilly Chevrolet, 6160 E Broadway, Tucson. Meetings are in the 2nd story conference room above the used car office. TCA monthly meetings are held in conjunction with the Classic Chevy Club.

Regular meeting schedule varies because of the ever-changing sanctions placed on us by city, county and state governments. Currently meetings are being held every other month. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 19 at 6pm at Crown Concepts, 3930 W Costco Drive near Orange Grove and Thornydale.

**Jul 27-31, CORSA Convention.** San Diego, California. Crown Plaza Hotel, 2270 Hotel Circle North. Go to the CORSA





## Salt Flats *(continued from page 1)*

the poor salt surface, the team packed it up and headed home.

The conditions for Speed Week 2020 were much better. After some tow rig trouble made them late to the salt they flew through tech inspection and everything went smoothly. “When the salt is right ... the car is rock solid.” said Lloyd. With 250 pounds of ballast in the back seat, the Corvair handled perfectly with no lift at speed. They qualified for their record on Saturday and went to impound. Sunday’s return run fell short of the record but they qualified again on Monday. Tuesday’s return run was just as smooth and the team captured the record once again, this time at 146.125 mph.

Lloyd has become an air-cooled convert since racing his car. “Now I’m a complete fan of the Corvair,” he said. He currently has a 1965 Corsa that is getting a 3.1-liter engine and there are plans for more records in the race car. After he gets back from Loring Maine’s standing 1.5-mile race, a new engine will be built to go after the E/Classic Supercharged Production record at Bonneville, which is currently at 140.633 mph. It may also get a new Porsche transaxle, if the SCTA rules will allow it.

We’re looking to seeing more of the “It’s All Rick’s Fault” team on the salt at future Bonneville Speed Week events and hopefully, the Corvair’s success will inspire even more competition in the production class.



“I’ll have extra salt, please”  
*Jack Fids*



# Frank McKenna 1929 - 2020

Frank has been a dyed-in-wool Corvair enthusiast forever. Back in 1975, Frank and a few other Corvair owners got together and decided to form a Corvair club. That month the Tucson Corvair Association was official. Frank was the first Club president and went on to serve in that position through 1976. Frank passed away on October 13, 2020.

We wish his family well and give them thanks for sharing a little bit of Frank over these many years.



*Pictures of "AWRYTE" taken at the Phoenix Mini Convention in 1981*



# Corvair Production

The 1959 start up of Chevrolet's air-cooled compact  
BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

The rarest of the rare. That's what's so special about the particular Corvair depicted in this Chevrolet-issued public relations photograph. When the photo was taken, however, it was just a typical production-line image of a new car being assembled. But due to early production changes, modifications were made to the Corvair shortly after it was released to the public that rendered early production models-as this Cascade Green sedan-much sought-after. And it's all because of those three little slots on the front valance.

Shown hanging from the assembly-line body cradles at the Willow Run factory, this Fisher-bodied Corvair Model 700 is what's known in the Corvair community as a "hornslot" car; it's what many Corvair collectors and enthusiasts consider the Holy Grail of early production models.

Manufacturing of the Corvair began in September 1959, and it was during a very short period -around the first two weeks or so of production-that horn-slot cars were made. In order to hear the horns more clearly, three vertical slots were punched into the far ends of the front valance. Thinking that water entering through those openings might damage the horns, the slots were quickly deleted.

During the first year, Chevrolet produced 250,007 Corvairs, of which 186,891 were 500 and 700-series four-door sedans. The horn slots were only punched on sedan models, yet exactly how many horn-slot cars were made isn't clear; approximately 10 examples are known to exist today.

*December 2020 Hemmings Classic Car*



# Why isn't the 1960-69 Chevrolet Corvair worth more?

Paul Duchene 26 March 2018

Depending on your point of view, the Chevrolet Corvair was either one of the most creative or most foolhardy steps in the history of the U.S. auto industry. It was designed to combat the Volkswagen Beetle and adapted the air-cooled, rear-engine concept to American scale and style.

Its handling was no worse than the Beetle, but ambitious politician Ralph Nader exploited it for his own ends. In 1971 the National Highway Safety Transportation Board declared the Corvair as safe as any car in the early 1960s, but it was too late to matter.

Still, with 1,839,439 sold over 10 years, including 130,362 trucks, the Corvair was hardly a failure. It's among the least expensive ways into the U.S. collector car world and the best convertibles seldom surpass \$25,000. Corvairs are relatively easy to fix, with a reliable parts supply. Survivors are common outside the Rust Belt.

So why aren't they worth more?

First a compact history: Chief engineer Ed Cole aimed the Corvair (combining Corvette and Bel Air) at the Beetle in 1956. During development, the sedan was camouflaged as a 15-foot, six-passenger Australian Holden, with a rear-mounted, 140-cubic-inch, air-cooled flat-six-cylinder engine, and GM's first fully independent suspension. Corvair production began on July 7, 1959 and it was *Motor Trend's* 1960 Car Of The Year.

Initial models were 500 and 700 4-door sedans, followed by a Monza coupe in April 1960, a four-speed option for 1961, and turbocharging in 1962. Target price was \$2,000, but heater, radio and a Powerglide transmission added up to \$2258 plus shipping—only \$341

less than a full-size Impala coupe. Claimed mileage was 26 mpg highway, but a gas-powered heater reduced that, and a forced air heater was offered in 1961.

A Corvan, Greenbrier passenger van, Lakewood station wagon and Rampside pickup arrived in 1961; convertible and Spyder packages in April 1962. Turbocharging bumped horsepower to 150 and opened up a sporty market in 1962, but the April 1964 Mustang launch rendered that short-lived. Even a 1965 Corvette-influenced redesign with improved rear suspension couldn't halt the pony cars, and sales dwindled until the final year of 1969.

The Corvair lost its driving force in 1961 when Ed Cole was "kicked upstairs" to head the GM car and truck group. Despite Corvair-based concept cars like the Sebring Spyder, Monza GT, Astro 1, and John Fitch's Phoenix, resources were redirected to conventional models.

Larry Claypool is a lifelong Corvair aficionado and technical editor for the national club magazine for 25 years. He ran a Corvair repair shop in Frankfort, Illinois for 42 years, and points out that a several factors conspired against the Corvair's acceptance.

"It's still a niche vehicle, not a mainstream Chevy," he said. "There were lots of them, but it's unconventional, with an air-cooled rear engine and limited performance potential. Even turbocharged, the hottest stock Corvair performed like a base V-8 of the day."

Claypool noted that once Cole was gone, the Corvair was an orphan. "Most dealers might have one junior mechanic who worked on them. If he was off, they'd tell you to schedule an appointment later." As an economy car, many were not

well-maintained, he said. Spares were common through the 1980s—even at dealers—but body parts have dried up. Door, trunks and hoods can be found, but everything else is welded together, making replacement pretty expensive.

While mechanical parts are available, a Corvair owner needs to know "the guy" nearby who can work on his/her car—or be handy themselves. "There are a lot of hands-on owners, but probably only a dozen Corvair specialists in the country." With prices low there's little incentive to specialize. "In most places it's easier to get a Ferrari correctly repaired," he said.

Partly due to low values, numerous barn finds survive, and are easy to revive in rust-free zones. Running coupes and sedans can be found under \$1,500, but don't expect any investment appreciation. Convertibles can be found for \$12,000-\$15,000, but rusty projects may be uneconomical to fix.

Claypool believes the 1965-66 Corsa coupe and convertible have the brightest future. They offered 140 hp with four carburetors (tricky to set up), while turbocharging delivered 180 hp, but the engine is happiest over 3000 rpm. Bill Mitchell's redesign was Corvette-like, and only 27,621 hardtops and 11,495 convertibles were built.

"A lot of major collectors now have a Corvair, and in the last five years people have been looking for these," he said. "You're much better off paying \$25,000 for a good, fully sorted one, than buying a project for \$2,000 and putting \$50,000 into it."

